

A dusty green and yellow trolley car clattered past us just as we turned onto the busy Lisbon street, so we decided on the spot that we'd hop on the next trolley that came along. We were on an exploratory trip around a city completely new to both of us. The ticket from the Aerobus that brought us from the airport to downtown would serve as a three-day pass on all the city's public transportation, which made it easy to ride wherever we wanted to go.

We saw a trolley stop half a block away and headed there to wait. After we looked around a bit, Rodger pulled me over to show me a poster on one side of the shelter.

"I saw one of these before," he said. "Look." He pointed to a graphic of a red AIDS ribbon in one corner of the sign.

I whipped out my dictionary, and we pieced together that the poster was announcing a march and rally in support of people with AIDS. It was to be held May 4, 1997—that very evening. The gathering place was easy to find on the map: Praça Pombal, a large plaza at the head of the major boulevard that led down to the Rossio, the square where the Aerobus had dropped us that afternoon.

We went on our outing, then caught a bus from the Rossio to the Praça Pombal, which was a large circular park surrounding a monumental statue of the Marques de Pombal. We didn't see anyone at first, but we heard loud rock music and followed it around to a large paved section of the park.

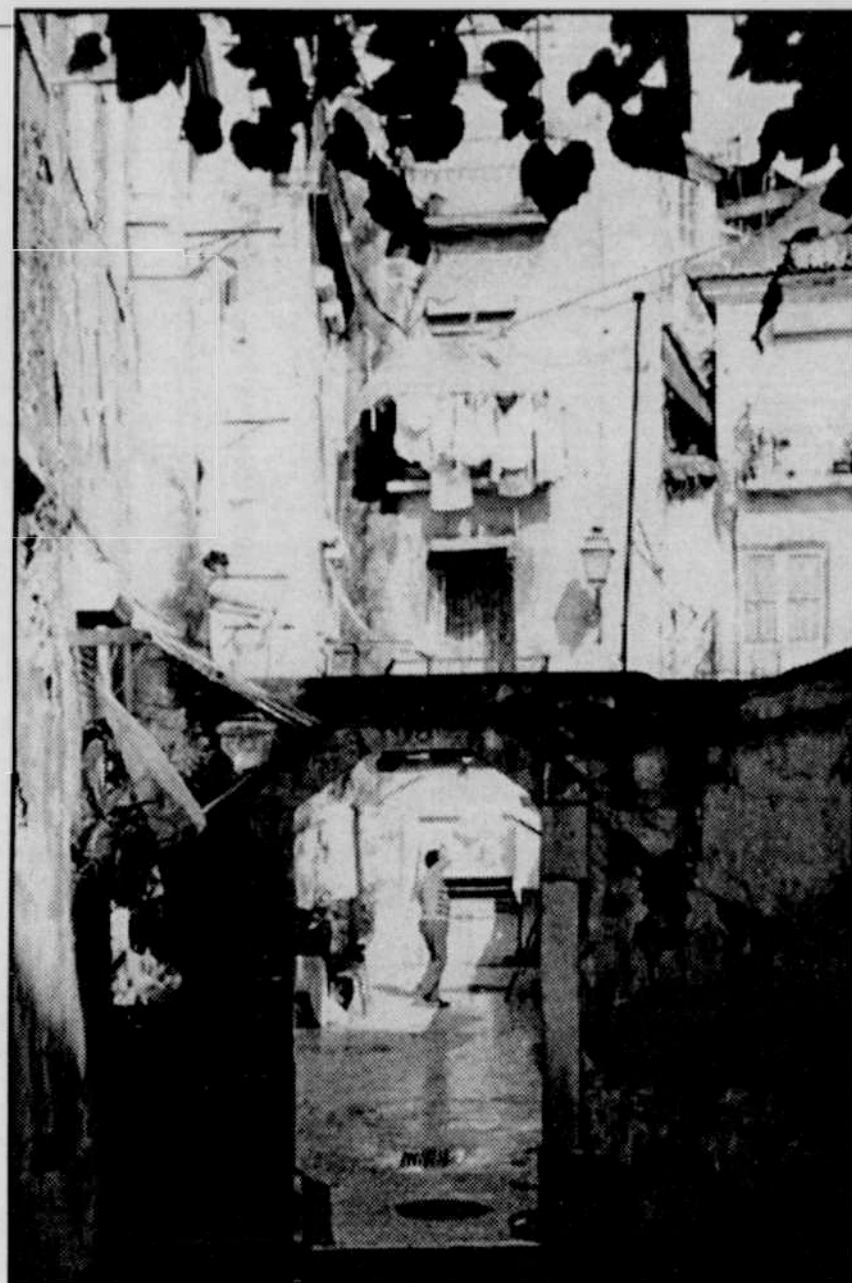
The music was blaring from a boombox sitting in the bed of a pickup. Several men were handing rainbow flags down from the truck to people in a small crowd that had gathered around. At nearby tables, people were selling rainbow pins, AIDS ribbon pins and lots of other gay and lesbian paraphernalia.

We milled around a bit and soon saw two approachable-looking men.

"Fala Ingles?" I said to one, using just about my only Portuguese phrase.

"Yes, a little," he said, giving me the standard answer. In fact, Carlos' English was completely fluent, and his friend Jão's was almost as good.

They were both graduate students. Jão had traveled up from the University of the Algarve, on the southern coast of Portugal, for the rally. Carlos did volunteer work with Abrao, the organization that was sponsoring this event.



Lisbon reminds many people of San Francisco

Going off the beaten path

A Portland man and his partner celebrate gay pride abroad

BY ANDY SIMON

"We do offer AIDS support services," he explained, "but our focus is much broader. We are the main organization of the gay and lesbian community. Portugal is still a very conservative country. We felt we had to call this march an AIDS memorial march, but it's really a Gay and Lesbian Pride event—Portugal's first."

Carlos obviously was pleased by the turnout.

"There are so many people," he kept saying, "and they're being so open," referring to the fact that everyone was clamoring for the flags that were flowing from the truck.

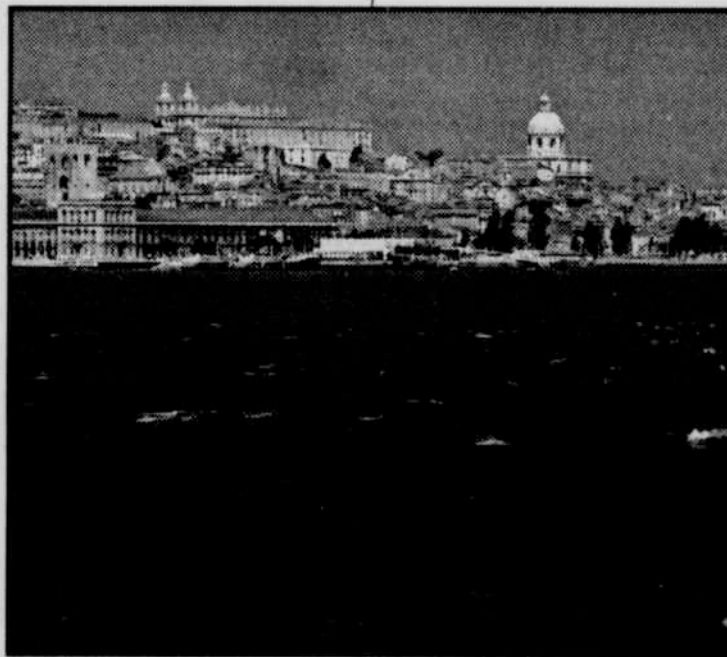
A roar of approval was heard as a group of marchers unfurled a 40-by-20-foot rain-

bow flag that would be carried horizontally through the march. Just then, the drizzle that had been falling turned into a downpour; thinking quickly, the people with the flag hoisted it. Others joined in, using the smaller flagpoles to hold it up as we all crowded under it to get out of the rain. We stood there for several minutes, a

big and happy crowd sheltering under a huge rainbow flag.

After a while, however, the seams began to leak, and many more marchers were arriving. But by the time the flag shelter was taken down, the worst of the storm was over.

As soon as it was dry enough for us to light the candles we all held, the march began. About 500 men and women



paraded down the main thoroughfare—called, appropriately, Avenida de la Liberdade. It reminded me of some of Portland's early Pride marches: no floats, no costumes, just a lot of people making themselves visible.

We crossed the Rossio and entered the Baixa district, an area of wide, stone-paved pedestrian malls. We headed down the central mall. The march ended at the Arche de Triomphe, which looks out at the harbor.

We met up with Carlos and Jão as the crowd gathered around the speakers platform. They were ecstatic. The march had been a wonderful success. There was no harassment, and what response there was from onlookers was positive.

The speeches started, and Carlos began translating for us. We stopped him, telling him he had to be here for himself and not for us. He agreed.

But twice he turned to us to fill us in. The first time the crowd just had broken out into a roar of boos and catcalls. Carlos explained that the speaker was a journalist who had done an exposé on a cabinet minister who had embargoed AIDS support funds because of his personal hatred for gays. So the next time his name was mentioned and the crowd booed, we booed, too.

Toward the end of the last speech Carlos turned to us and said: "I should explain this to you. The speaker has just said that there's been too much silence, so he's calling for a moment of noise rather than a moment of silence in memory of all those who have suffered from AIDS and who have suffered from anti-gay discrimination."

As Carlos was finishing this explanation, even with my limited Portuguese I could tell the speaker was counting. When he reached three, the crowd erupted: shouts, whistles, clapping, stamping—every sort of noise imaginable.

Rodger and I were pleased to add our voices to those of the crowd. We felt we were making a contribution, however small, to their cause, which in a way was our cause, too. For a moment, just a moment, we felt like we were participating in this important event for Portugal's lesbian and gay community—not just observing it. For that brief moment we had gone beyond being tourists.

As the roar died down to a loud murmur of voices, everyone congratulated themselves and each other for a wonderful event. We hugged Carlos and Jão, thanked them and went in search of a long-delayed dinner. □

ANDY SIMON is a teacher and theater lover who lives in Southeast Portland.

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